

The decline of the Linear Band Pottery culture (hereafter: LBK) concluded one of the oldest and the most important stages of the colonisation of Europe by the farming communities. As the phenomenon spanned the entire territory reached by the colonists, from west Ukraine to east France, a variety of predominantly “catastrophic” hypotheses has been put forth. It seems likely, however, that there was not a single cause, and depending on the local circumstances the course of the decline differed. The presented project is a study of one of such instances.

The project will involve the analysis of a complex of six villages situated in the valley of the Tuzznica River, which were established approx. 5300 BC by the LBK communities. At the turn of the millennia, a radical change occurred which encompassed many aspects of the everyday life. In the language of archaeology, it is described as the emergence of the Malic culture (hereafter: MalC). Among the manifestations of these changes, there was a new style of ceramic pottery, as well as a different structure of houses. Furthermore, individual graves came to be created, which due to their central location in the village, their construction, and the rich equipment (incl. flint sickles) beyond any doubts indicate the significant social functions performed by the men buried therein. Additionally, an enclosure was erected in the form of a circle made of a palisade and a ditch, which may have served as the ceremonial centre.

The aim of the project is to establish whether the described changes emerged, because new inhabitants arrived in the valley, or whether they resulted from a transformation which consisted in the abandonment of the traditional models of living in favour of the new ones. Currently, neither hypothesis can be ruled out, although it seems more likely that the LBK population inhabiting the valley experienced a crisis of some sort, and the changes constituted a reaction to the encountered problems. Of unclear status is the role played in this process by the new social and religious ideas that appeared in the Carpathian Basin and may have percolated to Lesser Poland, carried by small migrant groups. For we don't know whether these escalated the crisis, or whether they only helped in finding new solutions.

Within the project, the above indicated questions and hypotheses will be the subject of in-depth studies. Four issues will be addressed within them. The first thing to be researched will be the continuity of occupation. A timeline will be established where all the events in the history of the settlement in the valley, significant for the research problem, will be placed. These include the dating of the youngest LBK houses, and of the oldest MalC houses, the moment when the ceremonial centre was erected, and when the “Sickle Men” were buried. With that in mind, a series of 14C datings will be performed. The procedure of dating will use the lipids drawn from the vessels. It is an innovative method which enables us to date sites with no other organic material found.

The second issue considered in the research will be whether the inhabitants of villages representing the MalC may have descended of the earlier LBK populace. The 14C datings enable us to determine only whether the MalC villages were established directly after the LBK ones, or whether there was a gap between them. It is of major importance for establishing the causes and the course of the changes, but it does not answer the question posed. The problem will be studied using the “micro-stylistic” analysis of the ceramic vessels, and of the flint objects. It will serve to determine whether the craftsmen of the MalC may have acquired their skills using the same know-how, as that previously used by the local producers from the LBK.

The third problem is related to the social and religious content of the changes occurring during the transformation. The analysis of the differences in the operation of the LBK and the MalC villages (the arrangement of built-up space, the presence of communal facilities, house location patterns, and ‘special deposits’) will be used in the interpretation of the social significance of the innovations. Of particular importance prove the graves of the “Sickle Men,” as they constituted the most outstanding innovation of the MalC period. It was the result both of their symbolism, suggestive of the high social standing of the deceased persons, as well as the association with the famous “Sickle God”: a clay figurine discovered in the territory of their contemporary Szegvár-Tűzköves settlement (east Hungary), which may lead us to even bolder theories. We might at this juncture evoke the figure of the “warrior-hero,” and at the same time an ancestor, and a mythical founder of the lineage, of which the given community had descended. In this project, I put forth the hypothesis that these graves played the role of the crucial symbols used by the MalC groups, as the vehicle of a new historical narrative, whereas the ceremonial centre became the institution fostering the expression and perpetuation of the new identity, as well as the maintenance of the group's coherence.

The fourth objective will be the recognising of the sphere of interrelations, established by the neighbouring groups due to migrations (incl. the marital ones), and the exchange of raw materials. These provided the direction and the limits of circulation of various ideas and things. At the same time, they constitute the context delineating the limits of plausible parallels for scholars searching for the sources and directions of innovation transmission.

The results of this project, particularly the innovative concept of the research and the applied methods, will influence any further research in this field.